

Facts About the National Trust's National Main Street Center®

“Since the 1970s there has quietly emerged a program that brings this revitalization process on a wide scale to communities seeking alternatives to devastating change. With impressive results that defy standard measuring criteria, the Main Street Project of the National Trust for Historic Preservation has slowly grown since its inception in 1976 into one of the most successful national redevelopment programs.... It is a program that offers useful directions instead of easy answers, that values instincts of citizens as highly as expertise of professionals, that respects the inseparability of the economic and physical environment, the accumulated character of place....”

-Roberta Brandes Gratz, *The Living City* (Simon & Schuster, 1989)

What's happened to Main Street?

Main Street has changed. Once the vibrant center of a community's civic and commercial life, Main Street began experiencing difficulty several decades ago. Faced with tough competition from shopping malls and confronted with profound changes in consumer lifestyles, geographic mobility, and shoppers' expectations, Main Street fell behind. The increasing vacancy rate downtown triggered a cycle of disinvestment, as downtown buildings fell into disrepair and citizens gradually lost confidence in Main Street's vitality.

But there are answers to these complex problems. Throughout the nation, hundreds of cities and towns are proving that getting back to basics, working cooperatively, and incorporating a historic preservation ethic - an ethic of conservation - into their planning decisions, is breathing new life into Main Street.

What is the Main Street program?

In 1977 the National Trust for Historic Preservation, concerned about continuing threats to Main Street's historic commercial architecture, launched a pilot program - the Main Street Project - to develop a comprehensive revitalization strategy that would stimulate economic development within the context of historic preservation. It worked - and, in 1980, the National Trust created the National Main Street Center® to help communities throughout the nation conserve their most significant economic and civic resources, their historic commercial buildings. Today, the Main Street program is working in hundreds of cities and towns of all sizes, helping community leaders find new economic options for their important historic resources.

The Main Street program's success is based on a comprehensive strategy of work, tailored to local needs and opportunities, in four broad areas - the Main Street Four-Point Approach™:

- **Design:** Enhancing the physical appearance of the commercial district by rehabilitating historic buildings, encouraging supportive new construction, and developing sensitive design management systems

- **Organization:** Building consensus and cooperation among the many groups and individuals who have a role in the revitalization process
- **Promotion:** Marketing the traditional commercial district's assets to customers, potential investors, new businesses, local citizens and visitors
- **Economic restructuring:** Strengthening the district's existing economic base while finding ways to expand it to meet new opportunities.

Finally, the Main Street program must have strong support from both the public and private sectors, with professional management and active volunteers

What services does the National Main Street Center provide?

The National Main Street Center® serves as the nation's clearinghouse for information, technical assistance, research and advocacy on preservation-based commercial district revitalization.

- **Advocacy:** The National Main Street Center represents the interests of traditional and historic commercial districts across the country. Whether it's through meetings with federal officials and representatives of national organizations or through forging strategies for national action, the National Main Street Center® works to make downtown revitalization a national priority.
- **Technical assistance:** The National Main Street Center® provides on-site technical assistance to communities through a network of state and regional Main Street programs and independent services to individual downtown and neighborhood commercial districts on a fee-for-service basis. The National Main Street Center's services include basic revitalization training, advanced training in such topics as market analysis and historic preservation planning, assistance with organizational development, evaluation of the local revitalization process, and strategic planning for long-term downtown management.
- **National Main Street Network™:** A membership program that helps members learn from others experiences. Benefits of membership include Main Street News the National Main Street Center's newsletter; a telephone information exchange; substantial discounts on National Main Street Center® materials and conferences; a directory of Network members; the National Trust's Historic Preservation magazine; and access to the National Trust's financial assistance and insurance programs.
- **Conferences:** Training courses from general to highly specific, covering all of the four points of the Main Street four point approach to commercial district revitalization.
- **Research:** Building on the experiences of the communities actively engaged in successful revitalization, the National Main Street Center® conducts research on such critical topics as the impact of local planning policies on downtowns and the economic impact of downtown revitalization activity - then makes the results of this research available to the public, so that everyone can learn from it and strengthen their own local revitalization efforts.

- **Training materials:** A full line of materials designed to assist in the development of local, preservation-based commercial district revitalization programs.
- **The Main Street Certification Institute in Professional Downtown Management™** An advanced, professional certification program for managers of historic commercial districts.
- **National Town Meeting on Main Street™:** The Main Street program's annual convention.

Questions and answers about the Main Street program

How can my community receive direct, on-site help from the National Main Street Center®?

Usually, the National Main Street Center® works directly with a state or regional Main Street program to provide technical assistance to a limited number of designated communities. Most state and regional programs hold annual competitions through which interested communities can apply to take part in the program. The Center also works directly with individual cities and towns, depending on a community's needs and staff availability. The Center works on a fee-for-services basis.

How long does a local Main Street program last?

Commercial revitalization is an ongoing process. Just as a shopping center has a full-time staff and works constantly to ensure proper leasing, management and marketing, downtown and neighborhood commercial districts need ongoing attention, too.

How does Main Street work locally?

Typically, interest in developing a local Main Street program comes from business or property owners, city government, the chamber of commerce, historic preservationists or another civic-minded group. Community leaders (both public and private sector) discuss goals, establish an organization (Main Street programs are usually independent no-profit organizations), raise money to hire a Main Street manager, and create committees and a board of directors to carry out the work. Once established, the program's participants examine the commercial district's needs and opportunities and develop a long-term, incremental strategy to strengthen its commercial activity and improve its buildings.

What assistance is available to establish and manage a local Main Street program?

The National Main Street Center® provides direct technical assistance to cities and towns, both independently and in conjunction with a state or regional Main Street program. The National Main Street Center® also sponsors several conferences and a convention each year, and it offers a variety of publications, audiovisual materials and computer software to help guide local revitalization efforts. Finally, the National Main Street Center® offers a membership program, the National Main Street Network through which individuals and organizations receive current information on revitalization activities throughout the country.

One of the best ways to get started is to sponsor a National Main Street Center® assessment visit. During this two-day visit, one or two Main Street Center professional staff members meet with community groups and individuals, examine the commercial district, identify major needs and opportunities, explain the Main Street Four-Point Approach and offer guidance in establishing a program or strengthening an existing one.

Who should be involved in the local Main Street organization?

Everyone with a stake in the commercial district and its future should be involved. Merchants, property owners, the chamber of commerce, industries, local government, and private citizens all benefit from a healthy local economy and from a historic city core that reflects the community's heritage and ideals. A solid partnership is crucial to the Main Street program's success. In fact, a 1988 study of successful downtown revitalization programs in America, conducted by the National Main Street Center® and the Urban Institute, found that programs which were funded primarily by local sources were much more likely to be successful than those that relied heavily on state or federal funds. In addition, it is important that both the public and private sector support the program financially, demonstrating their commitment to its goals.

The Main Street program's economic impact

More than 1,600 towns, cities and neighborhoods have taken part in 46 state, regional, or citywide Main Street programs since 1980. In addition, hundreds of communities have adopted the Main Street Four-Point Approach™ independently.

The National Main Street Center® tracks the reinvestment taking place in communities that are part of state and regional Main Street programs. Cumulatively, these communities have experienced **more than \$39 of new investment for every \$1 spent to support the local Main Street program** - making the Main Street program one of the most successful economic development strategies in America.

- **Dollars invested:** More than \$16.1 billion reinvested in Main Street commercial districts
- **Building rehabilitations:** Over 88,700 projects completed
- **Jobs:** A net gain of more than 226,900 new jobs
- **Businesses:** A net gain of more than 56,300 new businesses created
- **Cost per job:** It costs an active Main Street program an average of only \$2,504 to create a new job on Main Street

What do I do next?

- Here are some things you can do to get started right away:
- Schedule a public meeting. Show the audience The Main Street Approach slide show, interspersing slides of your own downtown.
- Join the National Main Street Network™ so you can begin learning from other communities' experiences in Main Street revitalization.
- Meet with public officials to discuss their positions with regard to Main Street's future.
- Meet with civic groups and enlist their support for the revitalization effort.
- Organize a downtown festival to highlight how important Main Street is to the community economically, historically and culturally.

- Visit a nearby active Main Street program and speak with its staff and volunteer leaders about how the program works there and what its benefits are. Ask a Main Street staff person or volunteer to speak to your group of leaders.
- Sponsor a National Main Street Center® assessment visit to help identify your downtown's greatest needs and opportunities.
- Put together a task force to plan the next steps. Invite business owners, property owners, local government officials, the chamber of commerce, historic preservation groups, industry representatives, economic development staff and other key public and private civic leaders.
- Call us! If you have questions about how to begin a Main Street revitalization effort, feel free to give us a call at (202) 588-6219, or check our website at www.mainst.org.

How do I join the National Main Street Network™?

To join the National Main Street Network™ and get started, all you have to do is complete a membership application and return it to us, along with your payment. Call the Membership Department at (202) 588-6020 to have an application faxed or mailed to you.

About the National Trust for Historic Preservation

The National Main Street Center is a program of the National Trust for Historic Preservation, the only national, private organization chartered by Congress to encourage public participation in the preservation of sites, buildings and objects significant in American history and culture. The mission of the National Trust for Historic Preservation is to foster an appreciation of the diverse character and meaning of our American cultural heritage and to preserve and revitalize the livability of our communities by leading the nation in saving America's historic environments.

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National Main Street Center Staff

Lauren Adkins began working for the National Trust's National Main Street Center in 1991. After a sabbatical in 1998, she returned in 1999. She currently provides technical assistance to commercial revitalization organizations in partnership with Baltimore Main Streets and to the DC Main Streets Program. Ms. Adkins has worked with more than 100 communities in 28 states, plus the District of Columbia and Singapore. Ms. Adkins has served as a faculty member at various Main Street conferences and workshops, speaking on topics such as retail promotion, volunteer management, fundraising, market analysis, and strategic planning. She has authored several articles for *Main Street News*.

Before joining the National Trust for Historic Preservation, she served as a Main Street manager in Benton, Arkansas and as the executive director for a neighborhood commercial district revitalization project in Arlington, Virginia. Ms. Adkins holds a BA in Art and Archaeology from Washington University in St. Louis, Missouri and attended the Columbia University Graduate School of Architecture, Planning and Preservation in New York, New York. She is a native of Hot Springs, Arkansas. Ms. Adkins is the granddaughter and daughter of “Main Street” merchants who owned the Adkins Public Drug from 1934 to 1984, and her great, great, great, great, great grandparents opened the first general store in White County, Arkansas in the mid-nineteenth century.

Stephanie Redman is the National Main Street Center’s program manager for the technical services. In this capacity, Ms. Redman oversees all aspects of the Center’s technical assistance division operations, including marketing, staff supervision, budgeting, and client relations. She also continues to work in the field, focusing primarily on developing new state and city-wide Main Street programs and working directly with communities. Her work with more than 250 diverse communities in 33 states across the country has included a variety of commercial district revitalization technical assistance and training, with special emphasis on local organizational structure and issues, market-driven promotions, and coordinating program development. Ms. Redman is a regular conference speaker and contributor to *Main Street News*. For five years prior to joining the Center as a program associate in 1994, Ms. Redman worked closely with several Iowa cities, towns, and a county in her capacity as a coordinator with the Iowa Main Street program. She holds a B.A. in English with a concentration in Afro-American studies from Grinnell College and holds a charter certification to administer the Myers Briggs Type Indicator. She serves as volunteer president of her condominium association.

Valecia Crisafulli is a senior program associate for technical services with the National Trust for Historic Preservation’s Main Street Center. Previously she was executive director of Downtown Springfield, Inc., and the coordinator of the Illinois Main Street

program from its inception in 1993 until 1999. She also co-chaired the task force that started Illinois' regional heritage tourism initiative.

Ms. Crisafulli has conducted numerous seminars and workshops on downtown revitalization, including presentations at state and national conferences on topics that range from organization to business development to heritage tourism and hospitality training. She is a former retail business owner and principal in a public relations and marketing firm.

Ms. Crisafulli has a master's degree in humanities education from The Ohio State University. She and her husband Larry reside in Washington, D.C., and they have two grown sons.

Joshua Bloom is a senior program associate with the NMSC. He provides training and guidance to both urban and town Main Street programs in the Northeast and scattered other places. Among the urban programs he assists are twenty-one neighborhood commercial districts in the city of Boston, the Forest Park Southeast neighborhood of St. Louis, and designated communities of the National Main Street Initiative, a partnership between the NMSC and the Local Initiatives Support Corporation to establish Main Street programs in community development corporations nationwide. He also provides technical services to New Jersey and New Hampshire Main Street towns. Josh specializes in developing market analyses for traditional business districts. He received his B.A. from Columbia University and a master's in historic preservation from the University of Pennsylvania. He is a former molecular biologist. (Really.) Before joining the staff of the Main Street Center in 1995, Josh served as executive director of Main Street South Orange in South Orange, New Jersey, his home town.